

JUNE 8

ELECTION 2017

THERESA'S BID TO UNIFY COMMONS



Anyone who stands as a Tory must back manifesto



Some are trying to stop us every step of the way

First to talk . . . May gives exclusive interview to Sun

Optimistic . . . Mrs May outlined hopes in No10 study



MRS TEA
The PM has a cuppa and a chat with Sun

- Rebels won't derail Brexit
- Tories must fall in line
- Game-playing is over

MY ULTIMATUM

By TOM NEWTON DUNN

THERESA May has revealed that she called a snap general election to stop EU rebels derailing her Brexit negotiations.

The PM told The Sun that the trigger for her dramatic announcement was threats last month to torpedo her Great Repeal Bill as it passes through Parliament.

Anti-Brexit MPs are "trying to stop us every step of the way", Mrs May insisted last night, which is making it "harder for us negotiating with Europe".

The Tory leader also laid down the gauntlet to her own rebel Tory MPs — urging them to sign up to her Brexit plans, or ship out.

Delivering an election ultimatum to those who also refused to back her domestic reforms — such as bringing back grammar schools — the PM insisted: "Anybody who stands as a Conservative candidate obviously will sign up to the manifesto. That is a standard thing."

The demand heaps pressure on the significant majority of Conservative MPs who will need to be formally re-adopted by constituency parties as election candidates over the next three weeks.

The 60-year-old Prime Minister spoke to The Sun from her Downing Street study yesterday, giving her first General Election newspaper interview to the nation's most popular newspaper.

'We want the best possible hand'

She admitted the shock announcement yesterday was a dramatic U-turn on her previous pledge not to hold an early poll.

But Mrs May explained: "When I became Prime Minister, I thought the most important thing to do for the country was to have a period of stability."

"But around that time of the invoking of Article 50, it became clear the extent to which there was political game-playing and division in Westminster, which would have made it harder for us in negotiating with Europe."

"We want the best possible hand, we want the best possible negotiating position with the European Union."

"If you look at some of the things that were said there is very clear potential for voting against the legislation to implement the leaving of the EU, and against the final deal — trying to stop us every step of the way."

She added: "It became clearer that the next stages of the process — the Great Repeal Bill — would become more difficult."

"That's the key piece of legislation that allows us to repeal the European Communities Act."

"It started me thinking about the necessity of strengthening our hand in our negotiations."

Having toyed with the idea for a few weeks, the Premier said she



One to one . . . with Sun's Tom

used a pre-Easter walking holiday in Snowdonia with husband Philip last week to come to a firm decision about the need for an early election.

She told aides of her thinking on her return to No10 last Thursday, triggering an intense and top-secret five-day operation to put plans in place for yesterday's dramatic announcement on the steps of 10 Downing Street.

The PM added: "It was starting to crystallise just before Philip and

I went to Wales. But that just gave me an opportunity to think about it very deeply."

"Just before Easter, I had a real opportunity to think this through. It would strengthen our hand if we had a very clear mandate from people."

Revealing her hopes from voters on June 8, Mrs May added: "What I hope comes out of the election is support from the public to say that we agree with their plan for Brexit, so that when I go into Europe I've got that backing of the British people."

She also revealed she feared having to hammer out at least two

years of difficult talks which would rub up against a general election in 2020 — something Brussels could have exploited.

The PM added: "If we're negotiating at a point that is quite close to a general election, I think the Europeans might have seen that as a time of weakness when they could push us."

"Now we will be much freer."

As formal face-to-face Brexit negotiations will not start until early June, the PM dubbed the next eight weeks "a one-off chance" and "a window of opportunity" to go to the country for a popular mandate she is yet to win.

Revealing the offer the Tories will put to voters afresh, the PM suggested the election campaign will look like a re-run of David Cameron's "competence versus chaos" message of 2015.

The PM told The Sun: "The choice they face is between stable and strong leadership, which I hope they have seen, and a coalition of Jeremy Corbyn supported by the Liberal Democrats and the SNP."

"I hope people will put their trust in the Conservative Party to take forward what we've started."

Mrs May also faced criticism from some Tories yesterday for not

waiting for constituency boundary changes to be enacted in October 2018, which would have given the Tories an extra 20 seats.

But hitting back, she risked angering some Tories defending marginal seats by saying: "It is not about the Party."

"The crucial thing is what is in the interests of the country to make sure we get the stability and certainty, and leadership we need for the future."

She also shook off suggestions of election fatigue among voters who face the third nationwide poll in just two years after the 2015 General Election and last summer's

EU Referendum. Mrs May said: "You can never predict turnout."

"But I hope people will see it is important that we have the strongest position possible to deliver Brexit."

The Tories' election manifesto will have significant new policies in it apart from Brexit, Mrs May also hinted.

She said: "Having an election now gives me an opportunity not just to talk about Brexit, but also the UK beyond Brexit."

"Things will be different once we've left the European Union, and it's important that government has policies that addresses that." The

Prime Minister also rejected SNP leader Nicola Sturgeon's claim yesterday that an election victory in Scotland for her party on June 8 would count as a fresh mandate to hold another Scottish independence referendum.

Quizzed on the Scotland First Minister's claim, Mrs May said: "No. I'm very clear on why now is not the time for a second independence referendum."

"We need to unite as a country to take those negotiations forward, not try to divide people."

Mrs May also dismissed a suggestion by EU Council boss Donald Tusk on Twitter yesterday that the

FOREIGN AID VOW COULD BE DITCHED

THERESA May opened the door to scrapping a raft of 2015 election pledges that have shackled her administration — including Britain's huge aid handout.

She refused to rule out ditching David Cameron's expensive vow to spend 0.7 per cent of the nation's income on foreign aid.

And the PM would also not rule out dumping the Triple Lock on pensions.

The strong hint on what might be in the Tory manifesto came as her MPs called on her to seize the opportunity to free herself of the spending pledges.

EXCLUSIVE by TOM NEWTON DUNN and MATT DATHAN

Asked if the Tories would make the same promises, she told The Sun: "You'll have to wait and read the manifesto when it comes, won't you?"

"We will put out in our manifesto how we wish to address all these issues."

"What we will be doing is setting out for people where we think Government should go after Brexit, what the country should be like, and what sort of

country we want to be." Pledges by Mr Cameron, below, and ex-Chancellor George Osborne two years ago will send foreign aid to £16billion by 2020 and the OAP bill up to £80billion.

Backbench Tories say now is the ideal time to bin the "unpopular, unaffordable and idiotic" policies.

Jacob Rees-Mogg said it was "an opportunity to drop mistaken promises".

Philip Davies added: "There's no point making promises we can't afford to keep."



Snowdon poll stroll

THE snap election decision was taken by the PM on a five-day walking holiday in Snowdonia with her husband. Theresa and Philip May had been strolling in the North Wales foothills, right. She explained: "Before Easter, I spent a few days walking in Wales with my husband, thought about this long and hard and came to the decision to have an election."



TV debate off the air

THERESA May will duck any televised election showdown with fellow party leaders. A No10 source said: "They won't happen. TV debates just kill campaigns because they become all about them."

Lib Dem chief Tim Farron said she was "dodging scrutiny" and Jeremy Corbyn said: "It's strange that after calling for a general election, she's not going to take part."

EXCLUSIVE: PM TALKS TO THE Sun

Cam's guru to win ballot

POLITICAL strategy guru Sir Lynton Crosby has been brought in by Theresa May to run her campaign. The 60-year-old Aussie was also at the helm of David Cameron's shock victory in 2015. A senior No10 source told The Sun: "Lynton is on board, and we are delighted. He is the best in the business." He is set to move into Tory HQ within days with his key aides.



Strategist . . Sir Lynton